

The Hasidic Mother of Yeshua

by Paul Sumner

A Medieval Jewish tradition says she was a village whore whose son was the product of a liaison with a Roman soldier. This legend about Ben Stada and Pandira some Orthodox still teach as fact in their yeshivot. ⁽¹⁾

In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox circles she is venerated as the Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, and Intercessor between her divine Son and sinning Christians. Shrines commemorating her modern visitations dot the world, drawing pilgrims to come adore “Our Lady.” ⁽²⁾

In academic biblical scholarship she is often portrayed as a simple Palestinian peasant girl who lived on the borders of Judaism and Gentile paganism and was later beatified by the Church. Feminist scholars praise her for enduring and eventually triumphing over an oppressive Jewish male religious culture.

In contrast, the New Testament portrays Miryam quite differently.

There, she's a young Jewish woman who knows large portions of Hebrew Scripture by heart, worships the ancestral God, and entrusts herself to her Lord's faithfulness to his ancient promises to Abraham. Coupled with her faith, she lives obediently to the Law of Moses.

The Miryam of the New Testament silences the hubris of anti-Yeshua traditions, the idolatry of mother-son myths, and the contempt of anti-Semitic scholars.

She is worthy of praise and admiration—not because she is divine but because of her exemplary faith in the God of Abraham, and because she was chosen to raise the boy whom the NT affirms to be the Anointed One.

Miryam's true character shines most brightly in the first two chapters of the **Gospel of Luke**.

In her, Luke depicts a hasidic (pious) girl who lives among and raises her son among *hasidic tzaddikim*—that is, loyal righteous Jews.

(Note: [The Tzaddikim Who Raised Yeshua](#) in the [New Testament Studies](#) portal of [hebrew-streams.org](#).)

She is a vibrant spiritual Deborah with courageous faith, who (we can fairly assume) lovingly taught her son the Scriptures and sang him the Songs of Zion. She cannot be divorced from her Jewish environment. That is where the New Testament wants her to be seen. She is part of her people.

In this paper, I wish to restore Miryam's reputation as a daughter of Abraham and Sarah, and by doing so honor the God of Israel for molding such a person. Why call her “hasidic”? The following interpretations will explain why.

Hineini—"Behold Me, Your Servant"

Most everyone is familiar with the Christmas Story. But Luke's gospel narrative suggests that his purpose was to tell a very Hebraic story that any pious Jew steeped in Scripture would recognize and relish.

Here are the highlights of the narrative:

- A heavenly messenger arrives in Nazareth of Galilee and tells Miryam that "the Holy Spirit...the power of the Most High" will "overshadow" her (Luke 1:35). To overshadow [tatzel] is Hebrew idiom denoting the presence and creative power of God. In Genesis 1 the Spirit of God "hovered over" [merachefet] the primeval waters when he began creating. The psalmists often use this hovering image to describe protection under the "shadow" of God's "wings" (Ps 17:8, 36:7; 57:1), or the peace of living "in the shadow of the Almighty" (betzel Shaddai, Ps 91). The same Shadow [tzel] creates within Miryam a "holy offspring" (Luke 1:35).

(Related articles are [Betulat Yisrael: Mother of Messiah](#) and [Bezalel: In the Shadow of God](#), both in the [New Testament Studies](#) portal of [hebrew-streams.org](#).)

- Though Miryam knows how children are normally conceived, she's willing to trust God for this unique creation within her. "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord," she said to God's angel (v. 38). Her response is Hebrew slave language used by previous faithful ones in Israel, beginning with Abraham. It means the same as **Hineini** and it means: "Here I am. I'm willing to do what You want." Her son later expressed a similar spirit: "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27).
- When Miryam utters her words of obedience and faith, the holy creation apparently occurs and the angelic messenger leaves. Immediately, she seeks the fellowship of an elderly relative, Elisheva (Greek, Elizabeth), who lives far south in Judah (Luke 1:39). Elisheva (Luke tells us) is six months into her miraculous post-menopausal pregnancy with a boy who will become the forerunner of the Messiah, as prophesied in Malachi 3 (Luke 1:31-33).
- When she enters Elisheva's home, Miryam is greeted with honor. Elisheva, filled with the Spirit—before hearing any report from the girl—discerns that Miryam is "the mother of my Lord [the Messiah]" (v. 43). She then validates Miryam's great act of obedience: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord" (v. 45).
- Miryam bursts into a hymn of thanksgiving (vv. 46-55).

Miryam Fellowships with Israel's Mothers

Miryam knew she was in a unique position now. Who would believe her story? Who could understand the dilemma and delight of it all—bearing a child whom only the Creator could knit together? She didn't go to her fiancé. She sought out the one person who could understand.

Miryam's first response is significant. She seeks fellowship and encouragement from Elisheva, but also from the ancient biblical Hannah. Both were devout women who had their own miraculous pregnancies and God-chosen sons. One was a living relative; the other a heroine in Scripture.

Elisheva—My God keeps promises

"Eli sheva" means "God has promised or sworn by oath." That is, God is loyal to his covenant. Her husband's name, Zechariah, means "The LORD remembers (his covenant promises)." Promise and fulfillment permeate the story. That's what motivated and sustained these people. They believed God was true to his word.

Elisheva was one "of the daughters of Aaron" (Luke 1:5). Her husband Zechariah was a priest from the clan of Levi. They both served in the spiritual center of national faith: Jerusalem. They were *tzaddikim*; that is, "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (v. 6). But they had no child, and their cultural milieu viewed childlessness as a curse from God.

But they prayed, and God answered, beyond all imagination. Not only would He "take away [Elisheva's] reproach among men" (v. 25), their gift-son would wear the mantle of Elijah, the great reformer-prophet, and step forth to prepare Israel for the Messiah's arrival.

Whether Miryam knew the whole story about Zechariah and Elisheva is not told, but it is implied. Why else would Miryam go first to her relative's home for commiseration? Their two sons would be the triggers of a great spiritual earthquake within Israel. They needed to talk and pray together.

Hannah—God's Grace (1 Samuel 1-2)

Miryam also drew encouragement from the story of Hannah in Hebrew Scripture.

Hannah was a devout woman who lived *a thousand years* before Miryam. Like the ancient mothers Sarah and Rebekah, Hannah too was barren and had repeatedly asked God for a child. Eventually, miraculously, she became pregnant with Samuel by her husband Elkanah. When Samuel (Heb. Shmuel, "heard by God") was born, Hannah offered thanks then gave him back to God for service.

In reading her hymn of thanks, notice how Hannah interpreted God's answer to her request for a son. She didn't engage in self-indulgent mother pride. Samuel was a gift for a purpose beyond herself. He was part of the Great Plan. In time he became the esteemed prophet-judge who anointed David of Bethlehem as king.

"The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
And He will give strength to His king,
And will raise the horn of His anointed one [*mashiach*]." (1 Sam 2:10)

Hannah's name in Hebrew means "favor or grace." She knew she was graced. Yet there was no self in her praise; only confidence in God's first messianic foundations.

Compare the first words of Hannah and Miryam's hymns of thanks.

Hannah: "My heart exults in the LORD...because I rejoice in Your salvation." (1

Sam 2:1)

Miryam: "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior."
(Luke 1:46)

These lines have five similar terms: (1) heart or soul, (2) exalt or exult, (3) the Lord/God, (4) rejoice, and (5) a noun form of the word "save" (Heb. **yasha**): salvation, Savior. Miryam adapts Hannah's praise to her own use, but the essence is the same.

This suggests that Miryam had been meditating on Hannah's story and had memorized the ancient mother's song before arriving at Elisheva's door.

(For a table of comparisons: [The Mothers of Israel Sing: Miryam and Hannah in Praise of God](#) in the [New Testament Studies](#) portal on [hebrew-streams.org](#).)

Miryam recognizes her weighty privilege ("All generations will count me blessed"; Luke 1:48). But like Hannah, she sees her blessing as only another in the chain of "mighty deeds" God had worked in order to give "help to Israel His servant" (vv. 51, 54).

She doesn't turn the light on herself, or envision a new religion forming around her. She's focused on **The Plan**. Miryam is an Israelite with gratitude.

Miryam Nurtures a Two-Thousand-Year Flame of Hope

Miryam's song of thanksgiving (Luke 1:46-55) contains numerous phrases from, allusions to, and echoes from Hebrew psalms and the Prophets. Many of these texts rehearse Israel's national gifts and praise God for faithfulness. (See the table of [Biblical Sources of Miryam's Hymn](#).)

Her recitation (in v. 50) of Psalm 103:17 is thematic:

"The Lord's mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him."

She recalls how God

"...has given help to Israel his servant,
in remembrance of his mercy,
As he spoke to our fathers,
To Abraham and his offspring forever." (Luke 1:54-55)

In these two passages, the Greek word translated "mercy" (**eleos**) represents the Hebrew **hesed**.

Hesed

Hesed denotes God's steadfast, loyal love. Hesed has no seasons: it is unchanging love (Micah 7:18). It is the love that forms the protective circle of his covenant. For that reason, some call hesed "covenant love." Hesed is one of the seven defining characters of God's sacred name in Exodus 34: "YHVH, YHVH a God...abounding in hesed."

(See the brief study: [Hesed Adonai: God's Steadfast Love](#) in the [Hebrew Bible Studies](#) portal in [hebrew-streams.org](#).)

It isn't God's *mercy* that Miryam rejoices in, but his *steady love* for her, for her

people, and for the ancestors. That's the core of her understanding of what's happening to her.

Abraham, Miryam's Spiritual Father

Miryam was separated in time from Father Abraham as much as we are from her: 2,000 years.

Yet her sense of timeless continuity, of being one with him and her people throughout the ages—as though Israel were an eternal, living entity that embraced her—is very strong. She's living in a two-millennia-long Moment of Expectation toward the Living God.

"In remembrance of his mercy" (Luke 1:54) could be translated "in remembrance of His covenant love"—as he had promised to Abraham in the founding covenant (Genesis 12 and 15).

Note the link in Miryam's thought: "The Mighty One has done great things for me. His hesed is upon generation upon generation toward those who fear him" (Luke 1:49–50). The "great things" she personally experienced were merely extensions of God's hesed in her own generation.

Two thousand years before, God showed magnificent promises to Father Abraham. He was showing new ones to her.

They Presented Him to the Lord

Miryam's husband, Joseph, was a righteous man. In obeying the Torah commands (Lev 12:1–4), the two of them had her baby circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, and named "Yeshua," as the messenger of God commanded (Luke 1:31).

Thirty-three days later, they took him up to the Jerusalem Temple "to present him to the Lord," also according to Torah (Exod 13:2,12; Luke 2:22). They brought her firstborn to God: to humbly hold up her gift to the Giver.

In the Temple, the baby was perceptively and joyfully acknowledged by two mature Spirit-of-God-filled people: Shimon and Hannah (Luke 2:25–38). Their validation of the baby's unique identity must have deepened Miryam's peace. Yet the future didn't hold all incense and sweet music for her.

Joy and Shadow

Shimon told them her son would cause an earthquake in Israel in which many would fall and rise. His coming would expose the Jewish people's true minds about God and force them to choose their ultimate loyalties. He would also cause his mother suffering. "A sword will pierce even your own soul" (Luke 2:35).

It isn't clear what this sword would be. Perhaps it would be the years of public cynicism and mockery about being a so-called "virgin" mother. Perhaps seeing her beloved son grow up and become hated—as "a Sign to be opposed," Shimon said (v. 34)—then seeing him die on a Roman cross. Perhaps all this and more would pierce her deeply.

In Jerusalem, after Miryam and Joseph "had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord" (v. 39), they took their son back to Nazareth in Galilee to raise him. There, for thirty years, he "became strong **in spirit** [as many

manuscripts read], increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him” (v. 40).

Hasids and Hasidic

In the Bible, the word **hesed** is also used as an adjectival noun: **hasid** — a loyal, devoted, committed, and loving person. To be **hasidic** is to be loyal in love and obedient to the will of God: as it’s spelled out in the covenant. God guards his oath. And he’s the one who determines who is truly hasidic. His word is the template by which any person is defined as hasidic.

For this reason I call Miryam Yeshua’s “hasidic mother.”

She lived by God’s covenant-hesed, even expecting to witness acts of hesed in her day. She also lived a life loyal to his word. I believe she embodied for her son that core quality of God’s Name: “abounding in unchanging love and faithfulness...keeping unchanging love for thousands” (Exod 34:6–7).

The famous “excellent wife” in **Proverbs 31** is another model for Miryam and for all women in Israel. For this woman “opens her mouth in wisdom, and **torat hesed** is on her tongue” (v. 26). Most English versions render the phrase as “teaching of kindness” or “kindly teaching.” But it could rightly be translated “teaching [about God’s] covenant loyalty” or “the Law of Steadfast Love.” This is exactly what Miryam taught her son.

It was in this Jewish woman’s home that “Yeshua kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor [like his mother] with God and men” (Luke 2:52; note 1:28).

Was that coincidental?

Did God nourish the faith of this young woman for years, then only **randomly** select her to create a home atmosphere in which his Son would drink in scriptural instruction, songs of faith, hasidic love and tzedakah—from God, his Father?

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Notes

1 — The story of **Ben Stada** is found "in uncensored editions of the [Babylonian] Talmud" [Sanhedrin 67a]. **R. Travers Herford** has extensive discussion of this subject in his *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (orig. 1903; reprint Ktav, nd), pages 35-41, 55-56, 79-83, 344-60. The Jewish editors of the Soncino edition of Sanhedrin argue against Herford's connection that Ben Stada is Yeshua of Nazareth (at Sanh 67a). Instead, they say Ben Stada was "simply...a false prophet executed during the second century at Lydda" (folio 67a, new edition, 1987).

Jakob Jocz gives these rabbinic texts on the subject: Babylonian Talmud (BT): Sanhedrin 67a, 103a, 106a, 107b; Mishnah tractates: Yebamot 4:13; Shabbat 104b; Jerusalem Talmud (JT): Ta'anit 65a; Sanhedrin 25c,d; Tosephta: Sanhedrin 9:7, 10:11; and others. [J. Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ (The Relationship Between Church and Synagogue)* (1949, 1982), pages

59-60.]

But Jewish scholars are avoiding the fact that this story about Ben Stada antedates the Babylonian Talmud (ca. AD/CE 500) by over two centuries. The church historian, theologian and Bible scholar **Origen** [c. AD 185–254] referred to this story in his AD 248 work *Contra Celsum* ["Against Celsus" the Platonist]:

"Let us now return to where the Jew is introduced, speaking of the mother of Jesus, and saying that "when she was pregnant she was turned out of doors by the carpenter to whom she had been betrothed, as having been guilty of adultery, and **that she bore a child to a certain soldier name Panthera**": and let us see whether those who have blindly concocted these fables about the adultery of the Virgin with Panthera, and her rejection by the carpenter, did not invent these stories to overturn His miraculous character.... It was to be expected, indeed, that those who would not believe the miraculous birth of Jesus would invent some falsehood." [*Contra Celsum* 1, 32]

2 — Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christianity attribute to Mary the title "**Queen of Heaven.**" Paradoxically, the expression is used in the book of Jeremiah to refer to Ishtar, the Babylonian mother goddess who was worshiped by some Jews (Jer 7:18; 44:17,18,19,25; cf. Rev 18:7). Historians note that the Cult of Ishtar persisted into the Christian era. The early church in Syria incorporated features of the cult in its veneration of the Virgin; features which eventually were adopted by the church in Rome and the break-away branches that retained Roman traditions.

In Roman and Orthodox traditions, Mary is also deemed the **mediatrix** (feminine mediator) between humans (especially Catholic faithful) and her Son. **Pope John Paul II** (1920-2005) wrote: "In union with Christ and in submission to him, she collaborated in obtaining the grace of salvation for all humanity" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English ed. *The Roman Observer* newspaper, April 16, 1997), page 7.

This doctrine arose in the wake of the evolving abstract creeds that separated the deity Son of God from humans. The more divine Jesus "became"—in the thinking of Christians—the more they needed a human mediator. See the blunt admissions of the Catholic historian **Friedrich Heer** in his *God's First Love: Christians and Jews over Two Thousand Years* (trans. G. Skelton; New York: Weybright & Talley, 1970), 411-417.

Read comments in his "[Deification of Christ and Veneration of Mary](#) in the [Hayom \(Today\)](#) portal of [hebrew-streams.org](#)." On Mary as Mediator, see the biblical evidence **against** this doctrine in [Mediators in the Tanakh and the Mediator Messiah](#) in the [Hebrew Bible Studies](#) portal.

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"There is a river whose streams [*pelagim*] make glad the city of God."
(Psalm 46:4)